

## State Prepares for Return of West Nile Virus

KDHE is urging Kansans to prepare for the return of West Nile Virus (WNV) again this year. 2004 will mark the third year for the virus in Kansas and the fifth year for its presence in the U.S. To date, no cases have been reported in Kansas.

"We have no doubt West Nile Virus will be back in Kansas this year," said Gail Hansen, Acting State Epidemiologist. "Kansans should be prepared, not scared because there are things we can do to protect ourselves."

### To reduce the risk of WNV, KDHE recommends the following:

- Use insect repellent with DEET and wear protective clothing when practical
- Remove standing water
- Use larvicide in water that cannot be removed
- Refresh water for bird baths, pet bowls, and wading pools
- Limit outdoor activities at dawn and dusk when mosquitos are most active

"We are all at risk for West Nile Virus," said Richard Morrissey, Acting Director of KDHE Division of Health, "and we must begin taking these simple steps now to protect ourselves."

West Nile Virus is primarily a disease of birds, spread by mosquitoes to people, but it is not contagious from person to person. Symptoms range from mild (slight headache and low grade fever) to extreme (neurological disease - swelling of the brain or brain tissue) and in rare cases, death. Some people have no symptoms. Once a person contracts WNV, they are immune to it.

### New WNV Hotline/Web site address:

To assist Kansans with West Nile Virus prevention, KDHE unveiled a new toll free West Nile Virus Hotline that provides additional options this year. It is available for reporting dead birds for testing and for any questions about WNV. The number is 1-877-228-2287.



KDHE also unveiled a new Web site address to provide detailed information to Kansans regarding the disease in humans, horses, birds and mosquitoes. The Web site is found at [www.westnileks.com](http://www.westnileks.com).

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**Funding to Local Health Departments:**

KDHE has provided several county health departments with grant funding with mosquito control efforts and education efforts. The following counties requested and received funding: Cloud, Crawford, Douglas, Ford, Geary, Graham, Harvey, Lincoln, NEK Multi-County Health Department (Atchison, Brown, Jackson), Osborne, Pratt, Reno, and Seward.

**Increased education/outreach efforts:**

KDHE is preparing public service announcements to begin airing statewide on radio and television stations for release in early summer. Brochures and posters have been developed for use by health departments and other partners in this prevention effort. KDHE staff will also make presentations about WNV to communities upon request.

**Testing:**

This year the KDHE Division of Health and Environment Laboratories (DHEL) will test cases with neurological illness (meningitis or encephalitis or acute paralysis). These cases are the more extreme cases where physicians rely on the information to determine the best course of treatment. Private labs throughout the state also offer testing for WNV.

**Reporting:**

Last season KDHE expanded its public reporting of WNV cases to include not only state lab confirmed cases, but also private lab positives and blood bank information. KDHE will continue to use that expanded reporting process this year.

In 2003, 90 human WNV cases with neurological illness, were confirmed through the DHEL. Of these 90 cases, 7 deaths were confirmed WNV cases. In addition, 731 human WNV test results were confirmed by private labs. Three additional deaths were attributed to WNV, but unconfirmed through lab work. In 2002, 22 WNV human cases with neurological illness, were confirmed through the DHEL and no deaths reported. Hansen urged Kansans to focus on protecting themselves and reducing mosquito breeding grounds rather than waiting for the virus to be reported in their county.

“We simply can’t wait to take these precautions,” Hansen added. “Mosquitoes carrying West Nile Virus will be in Kansas again this year.”